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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, February 12, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FOODS AND WINTER WEATHER." Information from the Market Basket, by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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We've all been distressed by the floods in the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys. We've heard of killing freezes in California and Arizona, damaging orange and grapefruit groves and truck crops. Some of us are wondering how these winter weather conditions affect the contents of our market baskets.

We have come to depend on the sections that are usually frost-free to supply us with fresh mid-winter peas, snap beans, and ten or fifteen other out-of-season food products. All through the coldest weather these vegetables and some of the southern-grown fruits are sold wherever the railroads and motor-trucks can carry them. We take for granted the improvements in railroad car refrigeration that delivers California lettuce in garden-fresh condition to New York customers. We are hardly aware of the telegraphed exchange of market news that keeps fresh products moving to us the year-around.

What, then, of the 1937 floods and freezes?

In the stricken areas the terrible floods of the great central river system have meant, of course, almost complete paralysis of the normal distribution of food supplies. Dangerous flood-damaged food will have to be destroyed. Weeks will elapse before flood sufferers can resume ordinary ways of living.

But outside of those sections, the flood situation has not seriously interfered with food supplies. The trains that cross the continent to bring western and southwestern fruits and vegetables to eastern cities have been rerouted around the flood area, and although some of the shipments may be delayed, most of them will eventually arrive.

The freezes in California have reduced the quantity coming east from that State at this time of year. Some supplies ordinarily go from Florida to Chicago and northern markets served from Chicago, via the Mississippi Valley routes. These are either cut off or sent north along the Atlantic Coast and then west. Products from the southwest can reach Chicago without entering the flood areas.

You've been hearing a lot about the December and January freezes in California. They have done severe damage. Orchardists have spent frantic nights tending thousands of oil heaters in the citrus groves, trying to save the orange and grapefruit and lemon crops. But the freeze has been killing, the money loss to growers very large.



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A short time ago I told you about the record grapefruit crop and the very large orange crop. The California estimates were included in those figures, so that now, on account of the freezes, the figures need some revision downward. The information thus far received indicates that the California grapefruit and lemon harvests will be 30 percent less than the estimates on January first. Navel and miscellaneous oranges will be 26 percent less, and Valencias 32 percent less. Arizona grapefruit has also suffered from extreme low temperatures.

Fortunately for consumers in other parts of the country, Texas and Florida crops have not been affected by the freezing weather that hit California and Arizona, and as these other States have large crops, especially of grapefruit, housewives can still get most citrus fruits at satisfactory prices.

And that's not all. Further reports on the freeze in the Imperial Valley of California indicate that the lettuce crop has been badly frozen and that sizes will be reduced. Most of the celery crop is probably ruined. Discolored carrot tops indicate considerable injury to young carrots. The full injury to the pea crop is not yet determined. Because of the severe damage to California peas in December, Mexico has sent us much larger shipments of peas than usual.

Now let's look on the other side of the picture. It is surely encouraging to us consumers to note that the winter crop of snap beans in Florida is 42 percent greater than the 1936 production and there is some increase in celery, which may offset the California losses. Florida also has a 32 percent increase in acreage devoted to its winter crop of tomatoes, but part of this acreage goes to canners. Early Irish potatoes are on the increase in Florida and Texas.

Texas is growing 94 percent of this year's early spinach acreage. Canners will take some of this but it is safe to predict that we shall be getting plenty of this important green vegetable all winter, because the total crop is 20 percent larger than last year's.

Complete figures are not available for all the out-of-season foods that come to our tables in mid-winter. But each year brings an increasing supply of kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, eggplant, green peppers, cauliflower, limas, and summer squash. We have ceased to be surprised to find them in our markets.

And don't you like to surprise the family with a strawberry short cake or a strawberry pie while snow's on the ground? For years now Florida has been sending strawberries north in December, January, and February. The quantities used to be very limited and the price high. It was not until 1920 that one could find reports of Florida strawberries measured in carload lots. That year there were 50 carlots shipped north in mid-winter. Last winter -- 1935-1936 -- one thousand and eighty-two carlots were shipped from Florida, and this does not include shipments by truck.

One reason why our mid-winter distribution of perishables carries on with such slight interruption is that the Weather Bureau of the U. S. Department of Agriculture maintains a special shippers' forecast service. This warns the railroads and transportation companies when there is a cold wave coming in a certain area, and food products may be accordingly delayed, or rushed ahead, or routed around the unfavorable weather. Just as, at present, shipments are being routed around the flood area.

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